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S P E E C H
RICHARD FLETCHER

TO HIS CONSTITUENTS,

DELIVERED IN FANEUIL HALL,

Monday, Nov. 6, 1837.

FELLOW CITIZENS! —

Manifestations of attachment to our common country and her free institutions, are at all times a spectacle full of interest and full of hope. It is a cheering and ennobling sight to witness an assembly of freemen gathering together in this temple of liberty, to consult on their common interests and their high duties. While in this place, assembled for our present purpose, the spirit of our forefathers hovers over us, and the father of his country looks down upon us with approbation.

Gentlemen, you have been truly told that this is an important public meeting. The importance of the elective franchise, especially at a crisis like this, cannot be overrated. Its exercise is a *right*, full of dignity and full of importance. The destinies of the people are in their own hands; and whether or not our free institutions shall be preserved — whether or not the Constitution, established by the toil and blood of our fathers, shall be perpetuated as a blessing to our children — essentially depends upon the exercise of the elective franchise. Every man has a duty to perform; every man has an office of trust imposed upon him; and every man owes it to his conscience and to his country rightfully to fulfill that trust — fearlessly to perform that duty;

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and at all times, in every crisis, especially in times like these, to exhibit a proper degree of feeling and manly affection for the interests and the well-being of his country.

You are about to exercise this right under circumstances which give it accumulated value and importance; under circumstances, such as have rested at no past time lately, and at no future time perhaps at all will rest upon you. Every vote which is now given should be thrown with distinct reference to the state of our national affairs. The candidates before you either maintain or oppose the policy of the general government; and the result of the election will lead either to the approval or condemnation of that policy. It becomes, therefore, of the highest importance to direct attention to the condition of the country — to the declared views, and to the policy of the administration.

In relation to this subject, I have some duties which I am anxious fully and faithfully to discharge. You have placed me on the watch tower as a sentinel of liberty, and I come to tell you what I have seen, what I have heard, what I have done, in order that you may judge if all be well. If I know anything of my own heart, when I accepted the trust you saw fit to confide to me, I was actuated by no sinister nor selfish motive; I was wedded to no party; I was pledged to no system; I was committed to no course. I had nothing in view, I desired nothing, I sought nothing, but faithfully and vigilantly to discharge my duty to my country, to myself, and to you. I had no desire to oppose the administration. On the contrary, I hold that every man is bound to aid the administration of his country, except for some good reason to the contrary. For myself, I am desirous to be judged by that rule; I intend to act by it; and I am willing to answer for my course with respect to it, to my country and my conscience. But

while I hold it the bounden duty of every man to uphold the administration but for some good and sufficient reason to the contrary, I consider it equally his duty to withhold from that administration his support, when its spirit is hostile to the best interests of the people. It is then the course of duty to oppose the administration. It is patriotism to oppose it; and the man who does not oppose it is a traitor to himself and to his country.

Let us look, then, a few moments, at the course and general policy of the present administration of this country.

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It is painful to look back; and I fear that but little encouragement can be discerned in looking forward. But it is a necessary duty. I need not detail to you here the circumstances in which we find ourselves. But a few short months ago, in the midst of peace and friendship with the whole civilized world, with the smiles of a beneficent Providence playing around us, we were suddenly plunged into a depth of commercial distress, such as has never before been felt amongst us. I need not depict the horrors of the scene. There are here too many aching hearts; too many brows furrowed with disappointment and care; to render such a description either agreeable or necessary. The hardly-earned savings of years of toil; the provision for declining age, and dependent families — scattered in an instant to the winds of heaven; the cry of distress sounded throughout the length and breadth of the land; — but unheeded by our rulers, — the suffering increasing and accumulating, — till at last, the general crash of the oldest and firmest institutions in the land, rang like a clarion through the lofty apartments of the Executive mansion, startling its slumbering inmates, and arousing them to a sense of the danger, and touching them at last with the feelings of alarm. Then was Congress assembled, as you believed, and as I believed, for the purpose of devising

some measures for the relief of the country. Your anxious eyes were directed to the seat of government ; and when the moment of meeting arrived, how painfully were your hopes and fears excited ! With what solicitude did you wait for the annunciation of the views and opinions of the Chief Magistrate.

You can better imagine than I can describe the throbbings of my own heart, as the intentions of the Executive were promulgated to Congress. You were not there present, but ere long, the message reached you also. The anxious and intense feeling on the subject, was such as no country in time of peace and quiet, ever before exhibited. All eyes were directed, all hands were extended, towards the General Government. The people looked to it for aid and protection as children to a fostering and affectionate parent. How were their supplications received ? How were their expectations answered ? In his communication to Congress, the Chief Magistrate passed over with an air of careless disdain the great topics which agitated the people ; and confined himself immediately and exclusively to an object for which the people care but little — but an object for which alone, as it appeared, he had convened that body, namely, *the relief of the Government !*

The message was divided into two great heads. Under the first head, the President undertook to assign the cause of the distress, of which, as appeared from subsequent parts of the message, he would have taken no notice, had not the Government been involved in it ; and under the second, to point out the remedy for the evils under which the government was laboring.

Permit me to call your attention to the first head abovementioned.

It will be remembered that by the Constitution, the President is expressly enjoined to communicate to Congress such information as he may possess, relating to

the important interests of the country. Congress were to apply remedies ; and unless the whole circumstances of the case were spread before them, how could they act understandingly ? It was the bounden duty of the Executive to inquire into the affairs of the country, and under the solemn sanction of an oath, to state to the representatives of the people fairly, honestly, and fully, the inquiries he had made, and the results he had obtained. Did he do so ? He gave his opinions as to the causes of the distress ; and what reasons did he assign for it ? He said that he had found a great increase in the number of local banks, an enormous enlargement of the issues of bank paper, extravagant speculations among the people, extravagant expenses on the part of individuals : but that there was no fault in the government, none at all ! The Government has done nothing wrong ; the Government had no mistake ; everything was perfectly right on the part of the Government. In the people, *in the people*, the cause of all the distress was to be sought and found.

The first inquiry which an intelligent people are bound to make under these circumstances is — “ Was this representation true ? — is it according to fact ? ”

Is the President, in acquitting the administration of every mistake, borne out by the facts of the case ? Did not the destruction of the United States Bank, and the placing the public moneys with the several local banks, afford new facilities for speculation and the extension of credit. Was not the importation of specie from abroad, — the importation of specie *upon credit*, so much fostered and encouraged by the general government, the chief, if not the only cause of the derangement of our *foreign trade* ? Was not the specie circular a prime moving cause of all our *domestic and internal difficulties* ? Over-banking ! over-trading ! If they existed, how came they to exist ? The President tells you that the world

stands on a tortoise ; but what the tortoise stands on, he leaves you to find out as you can. I appeal to you as intelligent, practical business men, whether the government were or were not chargeable with having contributed in a principal degree, if not exclusively, to produce that very spirit of speculation, of which they now complain? Does not every practical man among you concur with me in considering the government as having originated the evil ; were not the measures of the government the cause of the increase of local banks, and the occasion of the excessive issues of the paper of these banks? Did not the government encourage over-banking? Did it not seduce the banks into over-issues? What respect can we have for a Congress which would blindly assent to such assertions as those made by the President, which would absolutely and unequivocally acquit the administration of all blame, of having made the slightest mistake, and which would throw all the blame upon the people, and boldly charge them with having caused their own sufferings? I seek not to stir up party feelings ; I wish for cool discussion, and I appeal to every one to say deliberately with what security we can rely on the statements of an Executive, which indulges itself in statements like these ?

So much for the causes of the evil ; now for the remedy proposed. In the first place, when the people asked the administration for relief, the President meets the request by declaring that “*the people expected too much from the government.*” This is the sentiment, and these are almost the very words made use of by a writer in a monarchical government in Europe, while treating upon this very subject of commercial difficulties. Either the language is borrowed, or it is a most remarkable coincidence ! The people expect too much from government ! I deny it. I aver that the sentiment is a base libel on the people ! Such language might well be used by a

despot and a tyrant. The people expect too much from the government! Who and WHAT is the government? What is this government that tramples on the requests of the people, and tells them they expect too much? What is this government that spurns the people, and bids them hold their tongues, and not be running to the government with impertinent petitions? The very plea is an insult! What is this government? The whole nation is the government. The will of the people is the government. The men in office are the mere organs of that will, and when the people demand of them that their will shall be obeyed, are they to be told that they ask too much? The time has been, when language like this would have cost any man his place; and I trust in Heaven, that that time has not yet gone by!

It is the plan of the President to detach the government entirely from the people. "The people ask too much." The *office holders* are to be elevated on high — seated upon thrones of gold and silver; while the *people* are to grovel beneath in rag money and shin plasters! When, therefore, the people applied for a remedy, they were told that *nothing can be done*; that there is no remedy; — meaning that nothing *would* be done — that nothing *should* be done — except for the government!

The proposed remedy, it seems then, consists in the relief of the government, at the expense of the people. Let us now look a moment at the manner in which this remedy was administered.

During the session, the business projects upon which the House were called to act, came almost entirely from the Committee on Ways and Means. There are nine members of that committee, only two of whom are understood to be opposed to the general policy of the administration. I suppose you would like to know the manner in which the business was arranged for the

House. I will tell you the *Ways*, — the *Means* you will all see in due time. You doubtless suppose that this Committee of Ways and Means has some duty to do; some ways to devise, some means to find out; some plans to originate and mature for the action of the House. The committee, you imagine, look over the message, see what is recommended to be done for the benefit of the country; consult together as to the best measures; and lay the result of their deliberations before the House. Is this your idea, Mr. President? Is this what you think, fellow citizens? If it is, I am sorry to inform you, that you labor under a very great mistake. I once entertained the same ideas; but I soon found my error. No such thing, sir; no such thing. The chairman of the committee, steps up to White House, and there receives from the President or the Secretary of the Treasury, such bills as they wish to have passed by the House. The chairman puts the bills in his pocket, takes them to the committee; without any examination the majority of the committee approve them; the minority can do nothing; the bills are presented to the House, and received as the doings of the committee.

I aver to you that every important bill passed by the House, came to the House *ready drawn*, from the Executive. The Representatives are mere machines. Every measure is an Executive measure. I mean by the Executive, the President, and the heads of departments; the cabinet. They originate everything, put everything into the precise shape they wish, word for word, letter for letter, comma for comma; and the Executive majority in the House pass each bill forthwith, without alteration; and so far as depends upon them, without debate; just as it comes from the masters at the White House!

I had *heard* of Executive dictation — of Executive

usurpation — of Executive patronage. I thought that I had *seen* something of it ; but until I had visited the seat of government, I had no conception of its true nature, of its vast extent. I solemnly warn you against this terrible concentration of power in the hands of the Executive ! I see in it a most alarming danger—threatening, fearfully threatening the liberties of the country ! Executive power has become a very Colossus, which bestrides the land from one end to the other : and, fellow-citizens, if we do not overthrow it, most assuredly it will crush *us* ; and in crushing us, in crushing the people, it will crush liberty, it will crush the Constitution !

A resolution was introduced into the House from the committee on Ways and Means, declaring that it is inexpedient to charter a national bank. You may feel some interest to know how that resolution was got up. I will tell you. You will recollect that there were only two opposition members on the committee. The majority *would* do nothing for the people, and the minority *could* do nothing — except to report the doings of their masters in the committee and in the House, to *their* masters, the people ; and this at least, I for one am resolved to do. Very many petitions, from almost all the States, were sent into Congress for the establishment of a national bank. These petitions, as they were presented, by a mutual understanding were referred to the committee on Ways and Means ; and suffered to lie on the table till the whole should come in ; when, as was supposed, they were to be taken up and considered. So the matter stood ; when, on the last day but one on which that committee sat, the chairman, without preface or explanation, introduced the above resolution. It was opposed by one opposition member — the other being absent ; and the chairman was asked what had become of the petitions. They yet lay on the table ;

but the majority passed the resolution without opening one of them. The resolution was sent in, and by the help of the previous question was forced through the House. No doubt can be entertained that this resolution came down from the Executive in the precise form in which it passed. Here was a great and most manifest outrage on the liberties of the citizens. At least, they have the right to petition, if they have no other ; and yet, in a time of the greatest anxiety, when it was of the most vital importance that the views of the people should be communicated to their representatives, here was a successful attempt on the part of the Executive to cut off this intercourse ; to prevent the voice of the people from being heard ; to erect a barrier between the people and their constituents.

There is another subject on which I wish to say a word. For two years past we have been in actual open war with the Seminoles. For two years past we have been engaged in an expensive war, which is exclusively an *Executive* war. The opinion of Congress has never been asked upon the subject. An invitation has never been extended by the Executive requesting the people's representatives to inquire into any matters relating to this war in which the government is engaged. The Executive has carried on the war, and Congress has been called on to appropriate money to the amount of ten millions of dollars and upwards, to defray the expenses of it. They have done so ; and over thirty thousand troops have been enlisted, and have served in the field, in prosecution of this merely Executive war. The President has rendered no account, has asked no advice. Who knows how the war began ? who can tell how it has been prosecuted ? During the late session, a resolution was brought forward in the House, directing an inquiry into this matter. By the management of the Executive majority, this resolution failed

altogether ; and the Executive is suffered to go on in its course with whatever money it chooses to demand. The barbarous Indian has been enlisted, by presidential orders, on the side of the Christian white man, to fight his brother savage ; and the people look on without knowing anything about it : they only pay ! Who can deny that the country is in imminent danger, when assumptions of power so dangerous as these are suffered to go unrebuked and unresisted ?

The first measure proposed by the government, was the repeal of the deposite bill, so far as related to the unpaid fourth instalment of the surplus revenue, ordered by Congress to be deposited with the several States. There was due the State, under this act, between nine and ten millions. I need not detail to you the origin of that debt ; or recount the history of the passage of the bill to restore to the people a part of their own money, notwithstanding the strenuous opposition of the late Executive. The bill passed ; and the first three instalments were duly paid. The faith of the United States was pledged that the fourth instalment should be paid also. Many States, relying on this faith, had already appropriated their portion and expended it in public works. Notwithstanding the most urgent representations of the great inconvenience and loss which the States would sustain, in consequence of the violation of the contract on the part of the government — the repeal bill was passed ; and the payment was nominally postponed, though as I fear actually withheld, forever.

The second measure was the Treasury note bill.

At the commencement of the year 1837, exclusive of the money to be deposited with the States, there were in possession of the government about seven millions of dollars ; add to this nine millions more withheld, by the deposit repeal bill, from the States, and between six and seven millions more due from the United States bank ;

and all the ordinary revenue of the government besides. In addition to this, it was proposed to raise ten millions more, by the issue of treasury notes to that amount. I was unable to perceive any necessity of taxing the people to that amount; and was therefore opposed to the measure. And had it even been proved to my satisfaction that the proposed issue of treasury notes would have tended to the relief of the merchants, I should have felt myself bound in conscience to vote against it, on account of the dangerous principle of issuing paper money by the government. All history is opposed to such issues. The States, at the formation of the Union, knew and dreaded, and took precautions against the great and distressing evils which have always followed in the train of government paper money. The history of the old Continental currency, is one continued and solemn lesson upon that subject. If we consider further, the great additional power which such a system will place in the hands of the Executive, it will appear still more objectionable. My own mind revolted at it. The present is particularly the time to avoid consolidating in one hand, the tremendous powers of the purse and of the sword.

On two things more, I wish to say a word. One of them is the Sub-Treasury System.

The government propose, by this system, to collect all the revenue of the country in gold and silver, and after deducting an amount sufficient to meet the ordinary current expenses, to box up the remainder, and place it in the custody of some thousand government officers, scattered throughout the land. A formidable host of new office-holders will thus be organized, and stationed among us, --- quartered, I may say, upon the people. The specie of the country will be withdrawn from circulation and uselessly hoarded up in their strong chests. All the gold and silver being thus withdrawn

from the daily uses of trade, the people will be left to content themselves with such a currency as they may be able to get. Few would deny, that if the government were permitted to fasten this system upon the country, we should soon have an irredeemable paper currency. The banks are now unable to pay specie ; in this situation, they seek the aid of the government. But the government --- a government that has caused their distresses --- instead of assisting them, abandons them altogether, and takes measures to disable them from ever resuming specie payments. If the government is suffered to go on, the country will soon be flooded with an irredeemable paper circulation of twenty, forty, sixty millions, which the people will be compelled to use, while the office-holders will secure all the specie.

Are you willing, fellow citizens, that the government shall separate itself entirely from the people ; that it shall raise itself into a privileged class ; fare better than you ; exercise other and higher rights and powers ? How long can a government like ours maintain itself after it has lost the confidence of the people ? What shall sustain it when deserted by the people ? Upon what shall it rest, if not upon the affection and devotion of the people ? How long can it compel the people to look up to its members as beings ranking in a sphere above themselves ? After the interests of the people are separated from those of the government, can the people remain attached to it ? Will not a sense of injury and wrong be aroused at seeing the people worse off than their servants ? Who furnishes the government officers with their splendid houses ? Who built the capitol ? Who equips the navy ? Who furnishes the government with means to maintain its authority ? Who, but the people ? And shall the people be degraded to a condition inferior to that of those whom they create ? And yet there is nothing in this picture, revolting as it

is to every sensible mind, which the power of the Executive, if left to pursue its present career unchecked, may not bring forth. The scheme is not now in operation. It was so monstrous that even the party in power were compelled to lay it aside for a time; but it is still the measure and policy of the administration. It is only postponed; presently it will again be brought forward!

We have then an important duty to perform. Let us raise our voices against this same sub-treasury scheme, call on Congress by the imperious power of public opinion, to do their bounden duty in defeating it. If the citizens desire to place themselves under a government like that above described; let them say so at once. But if you would keep the government in subjection to the people; if you would have your public officers, your servants, not your masters, of you, and not above you, then it is most essential that you crush this new project in the bud.

I will detain you but one moment longer. The Executive, among other new doctrines lately broached, denies that the Constitution confers upon the federal government any power over the currency. To that doctrine I cannot assent. The federal government has exclusive power to regulate trade; nobody doubts that. But what is the currency, but the instrument of trade? an essential instrument without which trade cannot be carried on? Does not the power to regulate trade necessarily carry with it the power to regulate the currency, without which there can be no trade? The currency is the life blood of commerce; and when it becomes deranged, corrupted or disordered, commerce is of course disordered. The government, according to the new construction of the Constitution, has a power full and complete, over the general subject of trade; but over the currency, which is an essential part of trade,

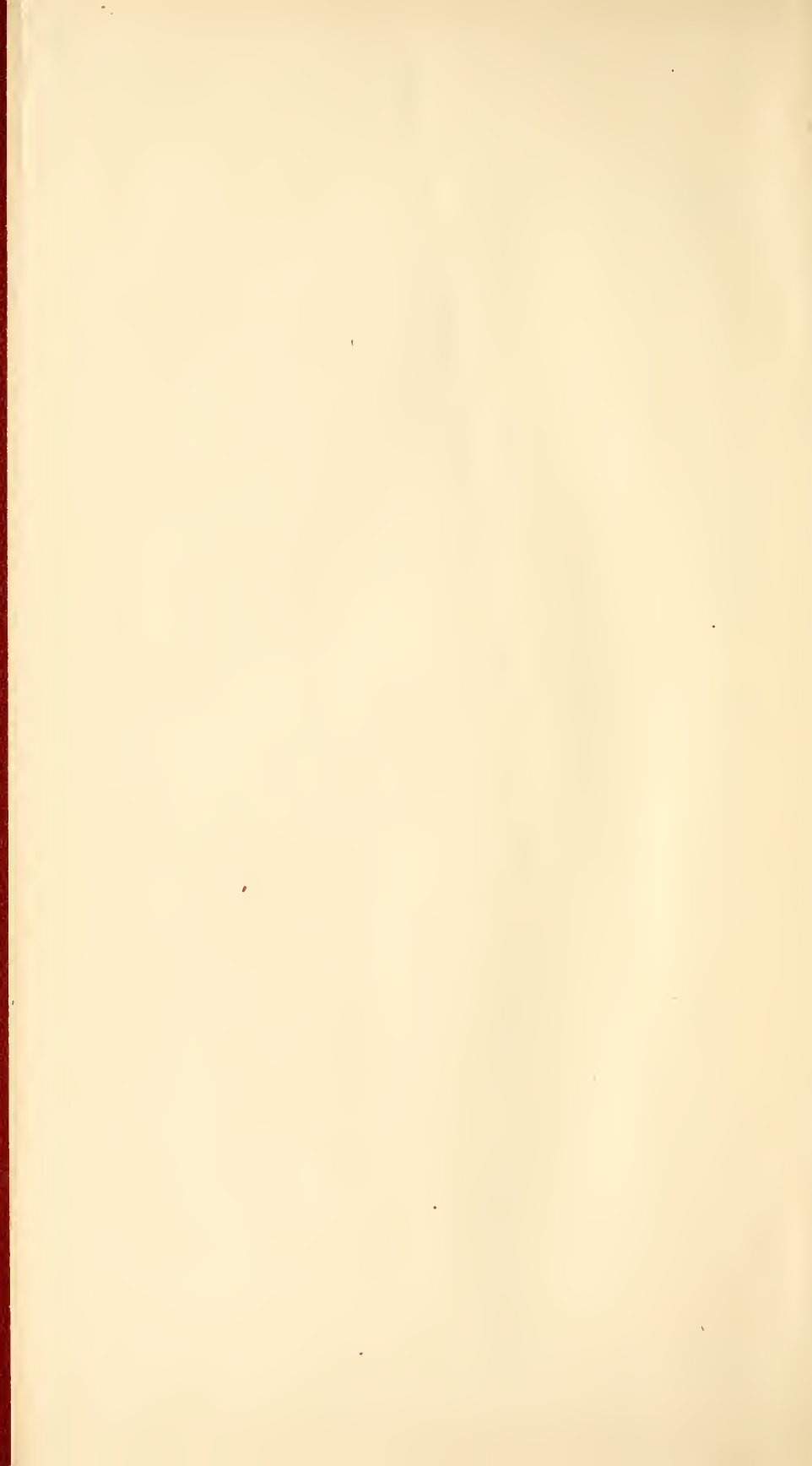
and upon the good Constitution of which the existence of trade depends; over that, they have no power at all.

But throw theory and speculation aside, we have practical proof, practical experience, that the federal government does possess the power, which it now disclaims. Times like the present have occurred before. We were not told by the government in 1791, that it possessed no power to exercise a controlling influence over the currency of the nation. When the people applied to the venerated Father of his country, then at the head of the government, did he say that he had no power to do anything for the regulation of the currency? Not at all! The administration of that day, saw the wants of the people, and adopted measures for their relief, which were completely successful. In 1814 the currency was involved in difficulties very similar to those which now exist. Specie payments were suspended, and so continued till 1816. Mr. Madison was then at the head of the administration. When relief was then demanded, when the government was called upon to regulate a disordered currency, did they declare they had no power to do it?

Did our rulers then tell the people that *they asked too much*? not at all. They did administer relief; they did adopt measures by which permanent relief was obtained. The country flourished under the system then adopted, — how well, need not be mentioned now. For twenty years the growth of the nation was without precedent; its prosperity increased beyond all human calculation. But for those measures, but for that well regulated system of credit which then existed, the tide of wealth, circulation, and prosperity, instead of flowing up the Mississippi and spreading beyond its western bank, would now be lingering along the shores of the Atlantic. On that system the country prospered; and never, till now, has the government been heard to say

that it had nothing to do with the currency. It is not true. The declaration is merely an indication of party policy. The system of the party is, to break down the banks; to reduce the people from the sound and healthy currency they lately possessed, to one of irredeemable paper; and to monopolise all the metallic circulation for themselves. They will do nothing for the country. But to carry out their party principles, to effect their own party purposes, they will do anything. They have destroyed the national bank, and they mean to destroy the local banks. They have rallied their friends under a new banner, on which is written, "Down with the monied corporations." This is their war cry; and when they say they cannot do anything for the relief of the people, or for the improvement of the country, what they mean is, *that they WILL do nothing.*

It remains with you to say, whether this system shall be carried out. It remains with you to declare, whether when your public servants avow that they will do nothing to relieve you — you will not take the matter into your own hands, and begin a general system of relief, by relieving the country, in the first place, from such rulers!





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